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**Citation:** Spicer, A. (2010). Extutions: The Other Side of Institutions. *Ephemera*, 10(1), pp. 25-39.

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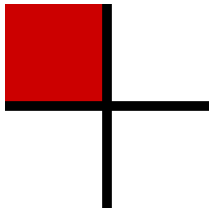
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## Extitutions: The other side of institutions

André Spicer

### abstract

Institutions are structured around an extitutional core that always escapes them. Extitutions are figures which have an ambiguous, destabilised and sometimes threatening quality. The central problem that institutional workers face is dealing with and ultimately capturing these extitutions. I look at two ways that institutions have sought to deal with extitutions – through attempts to discipline them or through more recent attempts to control them. I suggest that the generalised crisis of institutions may involve this passage from disciplining extitutions to controlling them.

We are in a generalized crisis in relation to all the environments of enclosure--prison, hospital, factory, school, family. The family is an 'interior', in crisis like all other interiors--scholarly, professional, etc. The administrations in charge never cease announcing supposedly necessary reforms: to reform schools, to reform industries, hospitals, the armed forces, prisons. But everyone knows that these institutions are finished, whatever the length of their expiration periods. It's only a matter of administering their last rites and of keeping people employed until the installation of the new forces knocking at the door.

(Deleuze, 1992: 3-4)

Institution. The very word seethes with meaning. When it slips from our tongue we think of a walled facility containing individuals who follow a strict timetable, wear similar clothes and share an occult language. It could be a prison, a psychiatric hospital or a factory. This is the kind of institution that featured so strongly in modern literature. It was Franz Kafka's *Castle*, Janet Frame's *Asylum*, and J M Coetzee's *Refugee Camp*. It was separated from the outside world by a strict parameter. It had an inner world governed by rules that remained opaque to everyone from the lowest intern to the dark figures who oversaw the system. Existence in an institution was a life lived in an 'iron cage' (Weber, 1958: 181).

Today, many claim we have woken from this nightmare. Life has escaped the institution. We are no longer bound by the strict parameters and normalizing forces that were once so predominant in institutional life. The demand of many movements for institutional reform has had a profound effect. The parameter fences have gone. They have been replaced with electronic tracking, care in the community, and home offices. The opaque rules have been replaced with ubiquitous corporate cultures. The shrouded mandarins who administer the system have shuffled away from their bureaus. In their place we find celebrity CEOs who never miss a photo opportunity. The indecipherable

language of professionals has gone. In its' place is brand messaging. Today's institutionalised life is lived in 'glass cage' where we are constantly on display (Gabriel, 2005).

For sure, the epochal decline of modern institutions is far from complete. Protests during the 1960s and 1970s bemoaned the spirit crush and deeply conformist nature of these institutions (e.g. Illich, 1973). Protestors pleaded for a de-institutionalized life. These demands for reform or radical repudiation have often created the grounds for the redesign and recalibration of institutional life. In some cases this has resulted in designs that appear to contravene disciplinary institutions. Instead of emphasising conformity, categorization and confinement, these institutions emphasize experimentation, boundary crossing and extensiveness. But at the very same time that we have seen the rise of such pervasive institutions, we have also witnessed the intensification of confinement in contemporary institutions like the refugee camp and the bloated incarceration facilities. We have also witnessed the rapid spread of categorization and conformity through audit cultures (Power, 1997), risk management technologies (Power, 2007), and performance management devices (Townley, 2007). Many modern institutions try to instil discipline as well as facilitate experimentation and self-exploration. Think of the employee who must display a creative flare at the same time as they meticulously track their work hours. Or perhaps the prisoner who needs to work through a personal development plan with their personal councillor at the same time as they adhere to a strict timetable. In both these cases we don't seem to have just an 'iron cage' or a 'glass cage' (or any other kind of cage for that matter). We appear to have 'cages in tandem' (Kärreman and Alvesson, 2004).

The result is that contemporary institutions are often paradoxical and confusing places. On the one hand, there appears to be a drive to escape from the strict confines of institutional discipline and to embrace a de-institutionalised life. On the other hand, there appears to be a continued attempt to extend various disciplinary technologies into hitherto un-disciplined aspects of social life. The result is a kind of double failure. On the one hand, escape attempts from institutional life become grist for the mill for further rounds of the extension of contemporary institutions. On the other hand, when an institution extends its reach, it often cannot deliver on all the fine promises which are made. But this double failure is also a kind of double success: attempts to escape institutions actually open up new areas for institutionalization; the failure of institutions creates many cracks and fissures in which non-institutionalized life grows (Deleuze, 1988: 70-93).

In this essay, I would like to explore the tension between attempts to escape modern institutions and the extension of modern institutions, between the failure due to over-extension and the creation of new zones of non-institutional life. To explore this tension, I will take a look at the other-side of institutional life. To do this I would like to suggest the concept of the 'extitution'. This is a kind of 'formless life' (Ten Bos, 2005) that exceeds, disturbs and does not fit with an institution. Some examples include the 'gay' who does not fit the institution of the 'traditional' nuclear family, the 'refugee' who does not fit into the modern state, or the 'idler' who does not fit with the disciplines of the modern workplace. Institution seeks to capture these extitutional (forms/entities?) through a range of strategies. However, this procedure remains beyond

the reach of most modern institutions and they lack the capacity to completely capture and domesticate extitutions. The result is cracks and fissures in the institutional edifice that the formless life of an extitution spills out of. Further, I would like to argue that the strategies that institutional workers use to capture these extitutions are configured in different ways. Modern disciplinary institutions seek to confine and normalize extitutions. In contrast, post-modern controlling institutions are more permissive and seek to harness extitutions (Deleuze, 1992; Hardt, 1998).

In the essay that follows, I will substantiate this argument. I will begin with accounts of modern institutions that highlight how they seek to progressively rationalize the social world. I then note that existing studies of institutions have largely missed how they target what I call extitution. I then consider some of the ways these extitutions are handled. I give the example of 'disciplinary' and 'control' based strategies (Deleuze, 1992). I then conclude the essay by drawing out what this might tell us about what some have called our current crisis of institutions.

## **The institution**

The concept of the institution is central to sociological thought. It has a long history that can be traced back to multiple roots including Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, and various American political reformers (see; Scott, 2001 chapter 1). The result is that there remain multiple and competing accounts of exactly what an institution is (Schmidt, forthcoming). Within the ghetto of Organization Studies, we find that definitions have been largely dominated by 'neo-institutional' accounts (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991). The typical definition we find here seems to be regularized ways of doing something that cannot be changed without a significant (social) cost. For instance in his standard introduction to the subject, Scott (2001) defines institutions as 'cultured-cognitive, normative and regulative elements that...provide stability and meaning to social life...Institutions are transmitted by various types of carriers, including symbolic systems, relational systems, routines and artefacts' (p.48). Similarly, Fligstein (2001: 108) sees institutions as the 'rules and shared meanings ... that define social relationships, help define who occupies what position in those relationships and guide interaction by giving actors cognitive frames or sets of meanings to interpret the behaviour of others'.

Organization theory has largely focused on how institutions are 'rational myths' that give organizations a sense of legitimacy (e.g. Meyer and Rowan, 1977). For instance, bureaucracy can be seen as a 'rational myth' insofar as it involves a widespread meaning that is associated with an organizational structure (Meyer and Rowan, 1997: 343). Meyer and Rowan point out that this myth is highly rationalized and impersonal. They transform what are often complex human negotiations into apparently object and value free rules. They also appear to be beyond the discretion of individuals. The result is that institutions appear to be reified things that individuals must conform with to gain legitimacy and avoid sanctions. This insight has led to a deep stream of research examining the power that modern institutions can wield. This work has pointed out how institutions shape what we think is acceptable, normal and legitimate (DiMaggio and

Powell, 1983). By doing so, institutions create a kind of iron cage of conformity which delimits what actors can and cannot do. In short, institutions are engines of conformity.

The axiom that institutions create conformity has been called into question with increasing veracity in recent years. Many studies reveal how the occupants of institutions are not ‘cultural dopes’ who adopt the dictates laid out by an institutional order. Rather, they seek to cleverly negotiate, and at times avoid the institutional demands they are burdened with. One way to do this is by symbolically adopting institutions in a way that is decoupled from the actual day-to-day activities (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; for a recent account see: Hirsch and Bermiss, 2009). Others have pointed out that actors often have a range of competing institutions that they might draw on in any situation. This allows them to splice together a kind of institutional composite that might make their practices appear to be legitimate (Zilber, 2006). Still others have pointed out that institutions might be resisted and rejected by actors – often in defence of their own traditions (Marquis and Lounsbury, 2007). Finally, many studies have noted that actors will frequently seek to depose existing institutions and replace them with new ones which they find more sympathetic (Maguire and Hardy, 2009). Thus no matter how entrenched existing institutions appear to be, they remain relatively fragile achievements that are constantly open to question and challenge (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2005).

Thus, institutions appear to be torn between two apparently opposing dynamics. On the one hand, there are attempts to create a sense of order and conformity through the propagation of ‘rational myths’ (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). On the other hand, those imprisoned within these rational myths frequently attempt to challenge and escape them. I am by no means the first to register these opposite dynamics. Within the neo-institutionalist literature, Stephen Barley and Pam Tolbert (1997) have argued that these dynamics create a process of structuration: institutions establish a structure which is elaborated, interpreted and challenged through action, which instantiates a new mode of structure. Another way these two apparently opposing forces have been brought together is through Seo and Creed’s (2002) ‘dialectical model’ of institutional change. They point out that contradictions in an institution will often create an opportunity for actions on the part of institutional entrepreneurs who seek to reconstruct or rework an institutional structure. This action then solidifies into a new version of institutional structure with its own brand of contradictions.

What these two well-known models have in common is an emphasis on a cyclical relationship between institutional structure and the various attempts to transform that structure. However, they both share a common assumption. Following much of the current obsession with institutional change, they are interested in wily and skilled actors who take advantage of gaps and complications in existing institutions. What this view misses is that how the various attempts at transformation of institutions often escapes the institution. We do not really understand how institutions seem to be fuelled by and find their meaning in the on-going work of capturing institutional escape attempts. We don’t know how institutions capitalise on all these attempts by actors to avoid having their lives reduced to the institution. In what follows, I would like to suggest that the concept of the ‘extitution’ might help us to begin to understand this process.

## The extitution

To begin considering the other side of institutions, I would like to start with a fairly simple axiom at the centre of Meyer and Rowan's (1977) analysis of modern institutions (which of course derives directly from Weber). The idea is that modern institutions rationalize. They seek to apply the rational institution to anything - mental illness, work, administration, or poverty. Dealing with these issues involves bringing them within the boundaries of a modern institution and subjecting them to rationality (or at least the mythical semblance of it). However, this process relies on one thing: an irrational other which the rational institution can work on.

This point was comprehended by Michel Foucault in his analyses of many of the great rational modern institutions such as the hospital, the asylum, the human sciences and the prison. He pointed out that each of these institutions would produce a whole discourse that made new issues visible and new things sayable. He also pointed out that these discourses created problems they could attempt to solve. The discourse of psychiatry created the figure of the mentally ill to which it would subsequently offer itself as a treatment (Foucault, 1965). Similarly, the discourse of criminology created the criminal who it would help to regulate and rehabilitate (Foucault, 1977). Medical discourse created the ill that could be cured (Foucault, 1994). In many ways these problems come prior to the elaboration of the institution itself. Institutional workers construct the character they do their daily work on. But this work should always remain incomplete. An institution always needs its problems to work on. The prison needs criminals, the hospital needs the sick, and the asylum needs the mad. Indeed, most of these institutions actually seek to extend the number of subjects who they address. This actually means that instead of trying to address the problem these institutions set out to solve, they actually want to extend the problems they can address. The medical profession has been famously successful at doing this by extending the category of 'medical problem' from immediate pain to nearly any discomfort from deflated libidos to depression to naughty children. In this way, institutions are myths that manufacture problems.

What is particularly interesting about the problems of institutions is that they appear to have a kind of formless quality. Before institutions set to work on their objects, they do not fit into the neatly formed categories institutional workers know how to deal with. Rather, these problems appear as 'formless life' (Ten Bos, 2005; see also Agamben, 1998). This is life that has not yet taken on a form that is recognisable in an institutional field. It is bare life that is not a citizen, a prison inmate or pupil. It is life before an institutional matrix has given it characteristics. It is not recognisable by the institution. It lacks a voice and cannot speak the language that an institutional framework might use to classify it. Because it does not (yet) fit into the categories and strictures of the institution, this formless life cannot be attributed anything like rights, much less any kind of responsibilities.

This formless life is excessive. By this I mean that it continues to overflow the capacity of an institution to cope with the problems it poses. One thinks for instance of an educational reformer marvelling at the unfathomable supply of stupidity, a mental health reformer talking about the mind-boggling depths of insanity, or a sexual health

campaigner speaking of the uncontrollable depravity of human desires. Each of these problems is not just beyond our meagre human capacity to deal with. They actually have no end. They are essentially excessive and cannot be brought under control. In short, institutions typically pit themselves against something that always overflows them. For the institutional workers, there is an endless supply of this incurable formless life to work upon. The excess that constantly overflows the institution is the force that activates institutional order and gives it an endless supply of subjects to work. It is the formless life that institutions seek to domesticate. This is what I will call an extitution.

The extitution is a figure that threatens to undo the regularity and order established by the careful regulation of an institution. The criminal is not the law-abiding citizen. The insane are bereft of rationality. The sick have taken leave of health. The child is in need of education. The act of giving order to an extitution therefore involves an attempt to give rise to institutional work. The asylum cleans up insanity and seeks to restore the rule of rationality. Institutions that regulate the market get rid of irregularities and return us to the normalities of perfect competition. The corporation eschews idlers and ensures efficient return on investment. The work of institutions involves attempt to give rational order to that which exists outside of institutional order, that which is essentially formless.

The creation of an extitution involves giving an ordered place to dis-orderliness, a form to formless life. Many years ago now, Berger and Luckmann (1967) pointed out this happens through a process of reification whereby our raw flow of experience is assigned meaning, which is then inter-subjectively agreed upon, and becomes reified into common categories and typifications. Through this process, a common language and common constructions of subjects and objects emerge. For instance, the discourse around the whale as a pleasant, playful, awe-inspiring and perhaps even spiritual creature has been instrumental in constructing a whole whale watching industry (Lawrence and Philips, 2005). Similarly the discourse of refugees as deserving victims allows a whole series of activities such as the provision or various forms of care (Maguire et al, 2004). The point seems to be that the discourse associated with an institution constructs a certain subject that the institution can address its work to.

But lurking behind these constructs is something that cannot be fully captured by existing discourses. Despite the massive profusion of discourse around it, insanity cannot be captured completely in discourse. Nor can the emotionally loaded figure of the illegal immigrant. As I have already pointed out, these figures appear to continually overflow the boundaries that institutions seek to place around them. They are always more than the institution. In some ways, they are unfathomable. They continue to escape the experts. Nonetheless, these experts try to spin all manner of strategies for capturing these extitutional elements.

In what follows, I would like to look at two strategies that many institutional workers have employed in their attempts to capture extitutions. Building on Gilles Deleuze's (1992) short essay 'Post-script to societies of control' (see also Hardt, 1998), I would like to argue that in some institutions, we have witnessed a stunning transformation in the way that extitutions are captured. This has involved a shift from disciplinary institutions to controlling institutions. Discipline captured existitions through strict

categorization, containment, using them for negative educational purposes and being a space of marginal insights. In contrast, institutions based on principles of control have developed a more permissive approach to extitutional elements. This works through facilitating the blurring of categories, spatial openness and extension, using extitutions for positive educational purposes and bringing them to the very centre of the institution. In what follows, I will look at each of these configurations in a little more detail.

## **Disciplining extitutions**

One of the central problems that institutions face is how to deal with extitutions. During what we might loosely call modernity, one of the dominant institutional responses to coping with and capturing extitutions was discipline (Foucault, 1977). This involved 'vast spaces of enclosure' (Deleuze, 1992: 3) such as the factory, the panoptic prison or the large hospital. These total institutions sought to discipline the various extitutional elements they contained. They did this through a range of strategies such as categorization and containment, using extitutions as a negative example and drawing on them for marginal insights. In the rest of this section I will look at each of these strategies in some more detail.

Modern institutions are sorting machines. Their driving question is 'what category do you fit into'? This activity of sorting and categorization in many ways is the very life-blood of institutions. Douglas (1986) points out that institutions work by providing a set of categories in which people and things are distributed. These categories literally become the world-view of that institution. One example is Appellation d'Origine Contrôlé (AOC) which is used to designate French wines by rank (Cru, Grand Cru etc) and region (Champaign, Côte du Rhône etc). The French wine industry is structured according to these categories that are maintained not just by an agency that designates wine (the *Institut National des Appellations d'Origine*), but also a set of national and international laws. These divisions are also maintained by the organization of wine in shops (where French wine are arrayed on shelves by Region), wine guides and critics (who use these categories as reference points) as well as consumers (who also use these categories to structure their vinological desires). Categories become deeply entrenched sign-posts that consumers use to negotiate their world.

A similar process of categorization has been noticed in aspects of the social world as far flung as crime and cheese, trees and terrorism. Institutions work by sorting what is often rather uncertain and malformed material into categories (Jenkins, 2000). This often happens through the process of the examination. Individuals and objects are put to the test to see if and where exactly they fit into these categories. Students are tested to see where they fit into various ranks ('gifted' or not). Cheese is inspected to ensure that it fits with AOC designation (for instance, whether Roquefort is stored in particular caves for the correct duration of time). The mentally ill are assessed by experts to designate them according to the categories of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM). Sorting and categorization is one of the central parts of modern institutional work.

A second way extitutions are handled is through containment. Prisoners are locked up, students located within a grading scale, and the insane are constrained to their wards.



Perhaps the most obvious way that containment works is through spatial confinement. If we consider any form of modern institutional architecture, we cannot help but be struck by the significant effort that is put into attempts to cordon off and restrict the extitutional elements that lurk within. Prisons, schools, barracks and factories all had well policed walls. These walls were there not just to keep the extitutional element in, but also to keep the rest of the world out. As Erving Goffman (1959) pointed out some time ago, these modern institutions were often 'total institutions' insofar as they constituted a whole world for their occupants. They provided for all the needs of the occupants within their walls. They feed, cloth, council and even bury their occupants. The result is that there is no need to go outside the institution. And if the occupant ventures out, they can be struck by the looming and lurching horizons of the chaotic outside world. Thus the walls of the institution not only protect society at large from what is contained within, they also protect the occupants from the horrors of the external world.

But these walls are not the way institutions work. As Michel Foucault (and his many followers) have pointed out, the principal way that extitutions are contained is through discipline. These disciplinary mechanisms come in all shapes and forms including the examination, the time-table, the surveillance system, and other modes of modern control. As we know, these modes of control work by giving the individual a precise location within the institution. They locate people in a precise fashion. Moreover, these disciplinary mechanisms are internalised by the subjects of institutional discipline. They inscribe the practices and very souls of the occupants of an institution. They become their daily co-ordinates, their attitudes and their movements. Indeed, the very life-world of an institution becomes made up of these disciplinary regimes. They regulate the ebb and flow of the institution.

Some-times extitutions are put on display. Doctors would bring 'interesting cases' of people who do not precisely fit into existing definitions before an audience (be it of medical students or the learned public). Also, we know all too well how the media typically feeds off cases of extreme or abnormal behaviour such as extreme crimes or bizarre medical conditions. Part of such instances seems to be some kind of voyeuristic declaration of 'Look here! How strange!' Another more striking aspect is the fact that this base voyeurism is followed by the statement – 'Let this extreme example be a lesson to you!' What seems to be occurring here is that extitutional anomalies become a negative educative prop used by the institution. Perhaps the most well known example that Foucault (1980) gives is the hermaphrodite Herculine Barbin who did not clearly fit into either category of Male or Female. Herculine's body became an important source for a whole series of institutional labours by priests and the medical fraternity. They tried to fit this curious body into the categories. When Barbin's body did not yield, s/he became an example to educate the broader public about the strange constitution of her reproductive organs as well as the importance of the institution of gender. Similarly, the frequent appearance of depraved criminality in the press is used to educate the public in the necessity of upholding the law. Modern anthropologists put the strange rituals of 'pre-modern' people on public display to remind their audience of their superiority.

The final way that extitutions are dealt with in disciplinary regimes is by seeing them as a kind of ladder to higher levels of insight. An institutional anomaly is thought to be

something that can provide access to the mystical and mysterious. This lends it a positive and educative character. For instance, mystical and insightful qualities are often projected onto the mentally ill. They are sometimes seen to provide greater insights into the reality of life and higher spiritual powers than the sane. The idiot savant is celebrated as someone who is both severely limited, but also especially gifted. What these examples seem to suggest is that anomalies that transcend or least confuse institutional reason can be re-harnessed by an institution as a kind of special power for dealing with and confronting unique situations such as the passage between life and death. In these cases, the extitution is a kind of element of magic in what are otherwise highly constrained and regulated systems. However, it is an element of magic that is highly limited in scope and application.

## **Embracing Extitutions**

The modern solution to the menace of extitutions was discipline. As I have already mentioned, the archetypal modern institution was Goffman's total institution – the place where you could never check out from. Such disciplinary institutions continue to litter the social landscape. There are still containment systems like refugee camps or the gigantic Foxconn factory in Southern China that makes Apple's iPods. And they shock us. This is because they grate against our liberal sensibility of freedom, movement, individualization and personal development. We find these systems of containment so scandalizing because they do not allow their inmates to 'be who they really are'. In other words, we find them abhorrent because they rob us of our apparently innate desire to nurture our authenticity. And as some have pointed out, it is authenticity that is the central practical ethic today (e.g. Fleming, 2009). All we want is to just be ourselves.

This was once the rallying cry of various radicals in nineteenth century Paris (Berman, 1970) and among many of the post 1968 social movements (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2006). Today, it is a demand that has been incorporated (to some extent) into nearly every modern institution including the workplace, consumption, culture and politics. Today, even the military promises potential recruits authenticity. A recent French Army recruit campaign used the slogan 'Devenez vous-même' (be yourself). This reminds us that some institutions no longer seek to contain the extitutional elements within them. Rather, they seek to rework institutional boundaries that had contained and disciplined this unformed life. For sure the extitution is still worked upon, still institutionized, but in a different way. This is largely because 'the walls of the institution are breaking down so that the inside and the outside become indistinguishable' (Hardt, 1998: 149). This has resulted in a situation where what were once relatively fixed boundaries and categories have become fluid. Instead of seeking to eradicate difference, it is harnessed. This is the form of every present yet constantly change power which Deleuze called 'control'. In what follows, I would like to suggest this embrace has led to some fundamental changes in extitutional handling strategies on the part of institutional workers.

I have argued that one way modern institutions deal with extitutional elements is through fixing them into safe categories. But it seems that post-modern institutions have actually registered one the catch-cries of 68: 'don't label me, man!' Instead of seeking

to strictly fix a label or classification onto inmates, intuitions actually seem to facilitate the blurring of existing categories. For instance, the modern workplace has produced a massive blurring between the category of the worker and the non-worker. This has occurred through uncertain boundaries between who is actually part of the firm and who is not. Contemporary workplaces are usually staffed by many operatives who are short-term consultants, temporary workers, contract workers and so on. Even those who are certain about their employment status have become unclear about what is work and what is private time (Fleming and Spicer, 2004). This has happened as aspects of working life invade more and more of our non-work life. At the same time, the organization seeks to draw increasingly broad aspects of our private lives into work (Land and Taylor, 2010).

A second example of institutions seeking to blur categories is recent changes that have come about with the 'enterprising up' of many social welfare programmes. Previously, those who found themselves in need of welfare had to put an inordinate amount of effort into trying to fit into various categories that might not strictly define them. Today, it seems strict categories between welfare recipients and those who work are being called into question. This blurring is done under the rubric of helping people to shift away from state dependency, feel empowered and ultimately re-entering the labour market. What we notice in both these cases is that instead of seeking to up-hold long established categories and points of difference, institutional workers focus their effort on blurring established categories. The extitutional anomalies that don't fit are not something to be forced into a category. Instead, they are to be celebrated.

A typical strategy of handling extitutions we have already looked at involves containment. Often this takes on very physical manifestations such as locked doors, fences, cells, and inescapable architecture. If we speak of 'institutional architecture' we seem to be referring to a complex of buildings that are faceless, impersonal, standardized and above all imprisoning. The central aim of much of this kind of architecture is to keep people inside, often rendering them unseen by the outside world. For sure, much of this institutional architecture still exists (think of a refugee camp for instance). However, many modern institutions have replaced this strict barred off and regulated world with something altogether different. In its place, we often find an architecture that actually encourages the exposure of the institutional inmates to the outside world. People are no longer immobilized in a particular place. Rather they are encouraged to be mobile, move around and to float in a creative and free way. Walls have been replaced by porous zones. Individual confinement has given way to internal cafés, encounter zones and spaces of play. And concealing concrete has been replaced with transparent glass.

These architectural changes are all underpinned by a broader attempt to facilitate interaction and movement. Yiannis Gabriel (2005) captures this in an essay on post-modern organizations that he describes as 'glass cages'. What is interesting for Gabriel is that this new institutional architecture encourages various forms of surveillance and exhibitionism. People know that they are always on display, and they act in such a way. This often involves displays of being unique, special and talented. The people inside are certainly not hidden away – they are out on display. However, at the same time as certain aspects of organizational life are put on show, there is also a whole underground

machinery which is hidden from view and quite opaque. In many ways this new form of architecture seeks to render some aspects of these institutions ‘transparent’.

Perhaps the paradigmatic example here is the reconstructed German Reichstag that introduced a ‘transparent’ debating chamber so that the public could directly view what is occurring inside (Barnstone, 2005). This involves an attempt to expose the dirty process of making laws, which, as we might remember, Bismarck advised we should not ask after (‘Laws are like sausages. It’s better not to see them being made’). Such a mode of making everything public has rapidly spread into most institutions. Organizations now gleefully create open-plan workplaces that encourage a flow of people through them. State bureaucracies try to render their internal workings visible, and in some cases encourage citizens to get involved. Even the military has got in on the act. For instance, the Swedish military recently relocated its Stockholm college from a 19<sup>th</sup> century central city building with thick and defensible walls to a glass and steel office complex which encourages people to pass through the site, feel engaged and render the activities of the modern military transparent.<sup>1</sup> We are reminded that while this building may provide an appealing transparent façade for the military in Stockholm, it also draws our attention away from other aspects of the military which may not be so transparent. The aim is to make the people within this institution visible and accessible to the external world – but also ensure this transparency does not go too far.

Modern institutions tended to use extitutions as a way of teaching people a lesson. I have argued that the lesson is usually a negative one. It serves as an example of what *not* to do. For the scholarly, they are peculiar cases that tickle the interest. In regimes of control, the educational value attributed to these anomalies has changed. Instead of being elements for vilification and questioning, they have become the focus of what we might call positive educational activity. Elements that don’t fit an institution are held up as examples of what *should* be done. They become a kind of example of something to aspire to, or at least to be carefully studied and learned from. We certainly saw examples of this in many post-1968 movements that sought to radically challenge modern institutions. One of the dominant themes that ran through these movements is that the extitutional elements at the centre of institutional life should be celebrated for their positive insights and potentiality. For instance, the patient in the mental asylum should not be seen as some kind of sick deviation from the norm. Rather they should be seen as providing more lucid insights into reality than those who guard and maintain the institution. This is because they are thought to have a more profound and closer relationship with reality than normal ‘sane’ society. Designing institutions becomes about creating a space where insights can be expressed, nurtured and perhaps learned from.

Another instance of this is the current obsession with ‘outliers’ (Gladwell, 2008). These are actors who wilfully adopt practices that seriously challenge or question existing institutional schemes. The student of institutional life is asked to turn their attention to these people who radically disturb existing institutions rather than study the boring arts of conformity. Indeed, if we were to believe the scholarly literature on the subject, it

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<sup>1</sup> I thank Fredrik Weibull for providing me with this example.

would seem that radical change has become the institution of the day. Being a good institutional player today means learning the arts of interrupting the institution.

In disciplinary regimes, extitutional elements were often seen as a way of accessing higher-level insights and hallowed places thought to be inaccessible to those who dwelled at the heart of the institution. They provided something special which only a few could grasp. And these rare insights were often to be found at the margins of the institution. Under regimes of control institutional anomalies don't just occur in marginal situations. They become seen as part of institutional life. Instead of providing rare and wild insight, things that don't clearly fit have become part of the daily life of some institutions. For instance, corporations are encouraged by various management gurus to hire radicals who are rule breakers (Fleming, 2009). They are also pushed to engage with social movements and copy their unusual practices. In the words of one author writing in *Harvard Business Review*, corporations should seek to turn these pesky 'gadflies into allies' (Yaziji, 2004).

We can see a similar process at work in popular culture. Previously marginal individuals have become mainstream consumer products. One just has to walk down the high-street of any English town to see an off-duty accountant wearing a tee-shirt with 'criminal' emblazoned on the front of it. Although we might savour the irony, the accountant does not. They are simply consuming a brand that is described as 'renowned for it's edgy, subversive attitude and wild party loving culture'. Passers-by do not bat an eyelid at this corporate crazy man. And after-all, our weekend 'criminal' consumer is part of a longer process of the colonization of cool. This has involved the marketing industries seeking to capture what were considered to be deviant and edgy practices from jazz, drug cultures and gansta rap and turn them into marketing campaigns for anything from automobiles to life insurance (Frank, 1997). In both these instances, we notice that even the most edgy and bizarre instances become something defanged and domesticated. But at the same time, they often become one of the central things which institutions like the innovation hungry businesses and the 'cool hunting' culture industries feed off and thrive. The aim is no longer to contain this extitutional element. Rather, it is to capture and exploit its unusualness, deviance and difference.

## **Conclusion**

In this essay, I have argued that institutions are driven by a tension between attempts to create conformity to modern rational myths and attempts to escape or resist these myths in various ways. Recent research in neo-institutional theory has partially addressed this tension by looking at how resistance can give rise to new institutions. Here I have sought to reverse this by considering how existing institutions feed off aspects that escape the institution. In order to understand this process, I have developed the concept of the extitution. I have argued that this is a kind of formless life which exceeds institutional parameters, but which institutions seek to capture. In many ways we can look at an institution as a huge machine designed to regulate and contain these extitutional elements, whereby the work of institutions is precisely this work of containment. However, I have also pointed out that extitutions are rarely completely

captured. Rather, they are excessive and often overflow the boundaries of existing institutions. This overflow gives rise to further rounds of institution building.

I have tried to show in this piece that there are at least two possible ways institutions have sought to deal with extitutional elements: through discipline and through control. The technologies of discipline developed in modern institutions certainly did not please everyone. There were many protestors who questioned institutionalized life. These include the anti-psychiatry movement, the prisoner's movement, and the de-schooling movement. At the heart of each of these movements was a desire to destroy the modern total institution and rebuild something altogether different. Their central hope was to break down the walls of the institution. Obviously these movements were often not completely successful. They did not demolish institutions as was expected. Prisons populations grew. Schooling took up more of our life. Work took over our time. Record numbers of the population are now on some kind of medication.

In some ways, we have never been more institutionalized than we are today. But if we look a little closer, we begin to realise that the churn and chug of these institutions has changed. An institutional life is no longer just characterised by regularity and discipline. Rather, the mantra seems to be innovation, diversity and experimentation. This has meant that instead of seeking to carefully contain the extitutional elements, institutional workers try to facilitate and engage them. The cumulative result was a thorough going redesign of institutions and their functioning. Instead of being designed around principles of closure and capture, the new institutional archetype seemed to be one of facilitation, boundary crossing and dialogue. The total institution is out. The open institution is in.

To be sure, empirical reality is often not quite as stark as this. There are many people on this planet whose lives are not incorporated into either disciplinary or control based institutions. Instead they rely on 'pre-modern' institutions such as kinship-based networks or exist in situations where most existing institutions have broken down (eg. Mair and Martí, 2009). There are others whose lives are totally determined and shaped by disciplinary technologies. There are others still who must deal not just with disciplinary mechanisms, but also strategies of control at the same time. Indeed, we might speculate that purely control-based institutions are relatively rare. Nonetheless, they seem to have become an increasingly important aspect of life today, which we are only beginning to understand.

The rise of control means that institutional life, for some, is lived beyond the confines of the iron cage. The boundaries of what is normal, permissible and legitimate have become increasingly porous. It is as if we increasingly occupy an institutional grey-zone. It is therefore not so surprising that the armies of neo-institutional theorists have recalibrated their increasingly complex instruments to track institutional change and irregularity rather than seeking an answer to that increasingly passé question of institutional isomorphism. It is also not so surprising that what passes for an institution in the social sciences has become increasingly gaseous. We once had a shared sense of exactly what an institution was. Today, it seems that almost anything can pass for an institution (a handshake, a meal in a fancy French restaurant, dolphin watching tours). At the same time as social scientists seem to have lost control of the concept, in our

daily lives we have lost a sense of where the institutions which we inhabit begin and end. To paraphrase Gilles Deleuze (1992), we are never finished with institutions like schools, the hospital, and the office. They are constantly present in our lives. This is because they have no beginning or end – temporally or spatially. We are always in training, always monitoring our health, and always at work (or at least on call). The result is what Deleuze so perceptively noted was a crisis in modern institutions. And this crisis is not just a question of how these institutions might be designed, created and staffed. It is also a question of how we might occupy and live within them (or perhaps outside them).

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